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Costa Ricans seek Basque in fatal bombing

By Julia Preston
Globe Correspondent

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica - Costa Rican investigators hunting for a terrorist who set off a bomb at a press conference held by Nicaraguan rebel Eden Pastora are focusing on one member of the secret Basque separatist group, ETA.

The suspect has been identified as Jose Miguel Lujua Gorostiola, 37, by Costa Rican authorities who say he bears a striking resemblance to the man who represented himself at the May 30th press conference as Per Anker Hansen, an assistant on a Swedish film crew. Hansen, a Copenhagen resident whose passport was stolen in 1980, was in Denmark at the time of the bombing.

Costa Rican investigators named Gorostiola as a suspect after comparing a police mug shot of the Basque with a photograph of the man who said he was Hansen, taken while the impostor was waiting for release from a hospital the day after the bombing.

Francisco Ruiz, a spokesman for the Costa Rican Office of Judicial Investigations, said that police still won't say positively that the impostor was Gorostiola, but privately detectives "strongly suspect" the Basque radical. A spokesman at the US embassy was confident that Gorostiola is the man who claimed to be Hansen.

No evidence has emerged so far to indicate whether the bomber acted alone or under orders from some organization or government.

"There's no concrete evidence, no," said US Ambassador Curtin Winsor. "But the force of suspicion falls on the Nicaraguan government. They would stand to gain the most from Pastora's death."

The explosion occurred May 30 at a jungle outpost of Pastora's guerrilla army in southern Nicaragua. It killed eight persons and wounded 27. Pastora suffered face and leg injuries but is reported to be recuperating in Venezuela.

Wednesday night a local radio station

replayed an interview with the man who identified himself as Hansen, taped the morning after the bombing. Hours earlier Hansen had eluded a question from a Costa Rican reporter by protesting in halting English that he spoke no Spanish. In the taped interview he spoke grammatically perfect Spanish, but with a very light German-sounding accent.

Costa Rican police have warned since mid-1983 of Basque militants moving through Central America seeking to kill Eden Pastora. The group originally espoused an independent homeland in Spain for Basque people, but in recent years have undertaken terrorist acts in a number of countries, apparently unrelated to their original cause.

Last Sept. 9, Costa Rican detectives arrested a Basque activist named Gregorio Jimenez as he was drafting a blueprint of Pastora's home. Under interrogation Jimenez admitted his link with the Basque Separatist group and is still in jail here charged with scheming to assassinate Pastora.

In mid-March Costa Rica received a warning from Spanish intelligence that nine ETA militants had departed from Panama, after being held by Panamanian authorities for two months. Costa Rican authorities now say Gorostiola was part of the group.

According to CIA intelligence, six of those Basques went from Panama to Nicaragua where they posed as Spanish journalists.

The man who represented himself as Hansen was in Costa Rica seeking contacts with Pastora at least one month before the press conference. A Costa Rican newspaper reported that he made a trip to Nicaragua during that time.

He suffered minor scratches in the explosion and slipped out of Costa Rica the next day. The bomb used is now described by authorities as C4 plastic explosive tucked into an aluminum camera case, covered with small batteries, and activated by remote control at a short distance.